

"Method, System and Device for Measuring the Polarisation  
Mode Dispersion of an Optical Fibre"

**TECHNICAL FIELD**

The present invention relates to a method for measuring  
5 the Polarisation Mode Dispersion or PMD of an optical  
fibre, to the system able to allow its application and to  
the device able to perform the PMD measurements according  
to said method.

**BACKGROUND ART**

10 As is well known, polarisation mode dispersion is a  
phenomenon of distortion of the optical signal that  
propagates in single mode optical fibres, i.e. optical  
fibres that carry signals in a fundamental propagation mode  
constituted by a pair of degenerate modes with orthogonal  
15 polarisation.

This phenomenon is, as is well known, linked to the dual  
degeneration of the fundamental mode of the optical fibres.  
Construction imperfections in real fibres (core  
ellipticity, external stresses, etc.) entail different  
20 group velocities for the two degenerate modes of the  
optical signal transmitted at one end of the fibre and  
hence distortions of the signal received by a receiving  
device (receiver) located at a second end of the fibre.

Therefore, it is important to develop accurate techniques  
25 for measuring PMD to characterise, for example,  
telecommunication systems that use optical fibres to carry  
signals, in particular in the case of high speed or high  
capacity transmission systems, for instance at bit rates up  
to 10 Gbit/sec or higher.

30 The PMD of the fibres is measured, for instance, by  
connecting a segment of optical fibre (fibre) 11 to be  
characterised to appropriate measuring instruments or  
devices 10 (Fig. 1).

**CONFIRMATION COPY**

The paper "Polarization Mode Dispersion of Short and Long Single-Mode Fibers" by N. Gisin et al, published on the "Journal of Lightwave Tech." Vol.9 on 7 July 1991 discloses, for instance, an instrument 10 for measuring the PMD, which comprises an optical source 21 (Fig. 1, Fig. 2), able to generate optical signals to be applied to the fibre 11, a Michelson interferometer (interferometer) 25 connected to the second end of the fibre 11, able to apply Differential Group Delays or DGD to the received optical signal and, at the output of the interferometer 25, a measuring device 27 able to convert the optical signals into electrical signals and to process, on the basis of program modules stored therein, the electrical signals received.

According to the prior art, the electrical signals obtained downstream of the interferometer 25 are graphically represented by the measuring device 27 by means of an interferogram having in its x-axis time offset values introduced by the interferometer and in its y-axis values of intensity of the photo-current generated.

In particular, according to the mentioned paper, said interferogram is to be interpreted as a Gaussian distribution of PMD of the fibre, so that the PMD itself can be determined according to the standard deviation of the Gaussian curve that best interpolates the interferogram.

This type of interpretation of the electrical signals derives from the fact that to the fibre 11 is applied a propagation model called "waveplate model", which consists of considering the real optical fibre as a great number of birefringent plates positioned in cascade with respect to each other and having their main axes oriented randomly.

This model is used, as is well known, to assess signal time-of-flight, in the hypothesis that at each interface between a waveplate and the next one the optical signal is coupled randomly on the main axis of the downstream  
5 waveplate.

Based on the known model and in the realistic hypothesis that the length of the fibre is far greater than the coupling length between the polarisations, the prior art concludes that the measured graphic representation  
10 corresponds to a Gaussian curve with a standard deviation equal to twice the standard deviation of the optical signal due to PMD and hence indicative of the PMD of the fibre.

However, it is believed that the measurements obtained taking the known model as a reference do not precisely  
15 correspond to real PMD values.

In essence, it is believed that the conclusions of the prior art, which are based on the identification of the distribution of the times-of-flight of the optical signal with the distribution of the electrical field are wrong.

20 It is also believed that the PMD measurements obtained according to the known model are consequently only approximately correct.

#### DISCLOSURE OF THE INVENTION

The technical problem the present invention aims to  
25 tackle is to determine a new propagation model of the fibre that will lead, in the first place, to a new method for measuring the fibre PMD that is more realistic under all computational conditions.

The present invention therefore aims to solve the above  
30 technical problem by means of a new model for interpreting the interferogram and consequently a new method, system and device for determining the PMD of the fibre, as claimed.

In particular, the new model which is based on the theory of propagation of the optical signal as can be determined according to the so-called Principal States of Polarisation (PSPs) of the fibre, leads to a new interpretation of the interferogram, characterised by the identification in said interferogram of a central peak and two side lobes.

Thanks to this new model, it is possible to determine the PMD of the fibre on the basis of the information content associated with at least one of the side lobes identified in the interferogram.

#### **BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS**

This and other characteristics of the present invention shall become readily apparent from the following description of a preferred embodiment, provided purely by way of non limiting example with the aid of the accompanying drawings, in which:

Fig. 1 shows a general measurement layout that uses the interferometric method (IM);

Fig. 2 shows a block diagram of the system of Fig. 1;

Fig. 3 shows a general diagram of the model of the optical source constituting the basis of the method according to the invention; and

Fig. 4 shows an example of the results obtained with the method according to the invention.

#### **DESCRIPTION OF A PREFERRED EMBODIMENT**

With reference to Fig. 2, the instrument or system for measuring the PMD able to use the interferometric method (measuring system or apparatus IM) comprises, in particular, an interferometer 25 and a measuring device 27 connected at the output of the interferometer 25 itself and able to control its operation, in known fashion, by means of a control connection 23.

The measuring device 27 comprises, for instance, a control unit (CPU) 30, a read-only memory unit (ROM) 31 and a random access memory unit (RAM) 33, all known and connected to each other in known fashion by means of a data, control and command channel (BUS).

The measuring device 27 further comprises a display device (display) 35, known in itself, and an opto-electronic module 37 associated to an amplifier 38, respectively able to convert the optical signals coming from the interferometer 25 into electrical signals and to amplify them; the display 35 and the amplifier 38 are connected, in known fashion, to the BUS.

The ROM 31, according to the present invention, comprises program modules developed when designing the measuring system 10 and able to implement the method according to the invention, as will be described in detail farther on.

Said program module, as will be readily apparent to a person versed in the art, can also be stored in the RAM 33 by means of reading devices, not shown in the figure, able both to read from appropriate computer products the program modules according to the invention and to store said program modules in the RAM 33 itself.

With reference to the measuring system 10, the method according to the present invention is based on the hypothesis of broad band radiation with spectral components that propagate according to the theory of the Principal States of Polarisation (PSPs).

In particular, with reference to the measuring system 10, the method according to the invention is based on the following interpretative model and the corresponding logical-mathematical passages:

- (a) the spectrum of the (incoherent) optical source is approximated in segments by a family of rectangular

spectral intervals with extension  $\Delta\nu$  (Fig.3), each described by its amplitude, by its random polarisation state and by a phase factor, which is also stochastic;

- 5 (b) the spectral width of the interval is specified relative to the band of the PSPs and to the bandwidth of the amplifier 38, in order to obtain a reasonably accurate approximation of the spectrum of the optical source 21,
- 10 (c) a statistical description of optical propagation inside the fibre being measured is used, in terms of ensemble of spectral intervals defined above, ensemble that excites a statistical set of PSP,
- (d) the output spectrum of the signal is thereby  
15 obtained, which comes to depend on a set of statistical parameters: amplitudes of projection on the PSP and on the axes of the polarisation analyser, values of DGD and phase factors;
- (e) the interferometric photo-current is expressed  
20 according to the power spectrum of the optical source 21 and of the density of probability of the DGD determined by the PMD of the fibre 11.

The result obtained at passage (e) represents one of the characteristic elements of the present invention and is  
25 applied to implement the method according to the present invention.

In particular, based on the proposed model, illustrated in Fig. 3, the spectrum  $S_m(\nu)$  of a randomly polarised source is subdivided  $M-N$  rectangular spectral intervals  $S_i(\nu)$   
30 having width  $\Delta\nu$  and amplitude  $U_n$  according to the following mathematical expression:

$$S_{in}(\nu) = \sum_{n=N}^M U_n \mathbf{p}_n S_e(\nu - n\Delta\nu) e^{j\phi_n} \quad (1)$$

Each replication translated in frequency of the fundamental interval has a polarisation state and a phase factor represented by statistical vectors  $\mathbf{p}_n$  and by independent stochastic variables  $\phi_n$ .

The choice of spectral width  $\Delta\nu$  is constrained by two extremes of a physical nature. The upper limit for  $\Delta\nu$  is the minimum band of the PSPs in the spectral domain of the optical source 21 (Fig.2, Fig.3), since the assumption is that every spectral interval propagates according to the model of the PSPs at the first order. This upper limit is, as is well known, in the order of the inverse of the average DGD for the fibre being measured and it falls within the GHz range even for values of DGD of tens of picoseconds. On the other hand, the lower limit for  $\Delta\nu$  is imposed by the opto-electronic module 37 and by the amplifier 38 which, as is well known, has a limited band, as set out in detail hereafter and it can fall in the range of hundreds of kHz.

A value of  $\Delta\nu$  selected within the frequency domain identified by said upper and lower limit is to be considered suitable for an approximation in rectangular segments and sufficiently accurate for all LED optical sources commonly used in IM apparatuses (10); moreover, this conclusion confirms that the approximation proposed in the mathematical expression (1) has correct physical foundations.

The set of spectral intervals  $\{U_n S_e(\nu - n\Delta\nu)\}$ , after being launched in the fibre 11, excites a set of PSP pairs, each characterised by the value  $\Delta\tau_n$  of DGD. At the input end of the fibre, the elementary spectral intervals are

projected on the slow and fast PSP, respectively with amplitudes  $\sqrt{\alpha_n}$  and  $\sqrt{1-\alpha_n}$ ; in which  $\alpha_n$  represents the power coupling coefficient between the  $n^{\text{th}}$  interval and the axis associated with the corresponding fast PSP.

5 In similar fashion, at the output of the fibre 11, the coefficients of projection of the output PSPs on the axis of polarisation of the interferometer are indicated as  $\sqrt{\beta_n}$  and  $\sqrt{1-\beta_n}$ . The spectrum of the signal after the latter selection in polarisation is then expressed in the form:

$$10 \quad S_{out}(\nu) = \sum_{n=N}^M a_n U_n S_e(\nu - n\Delta\nu) e^{-j2\pi\nu\Delta\tau_n/2} e^{j\phi_n} + \sum_{n=N}^M b_n U_n S_e(\nu - n\Delta\nu) e^{j2\pi\nu\Delta\tau_n/2} e^{j\phi_n} \quad (2)$$

in which, for the sake of convenience, the two new statistical variables  $a_n = \sqrt{\alpha_n \beta_n}$  and  $b_n = \sqrt{(1-\alpha_n)(1-\beta_n)}$  have been introduced.

The average value of the DGD of the PSP was neglected,  
15 referring the quantities  $\Delta\tau_n$  to the origin of the delays set at the interferometer.

Since in the time domain, as is well known, the interferometric photo-current  $I$  is proportional to the auto-correlation function of the output signal, in the  
20 frequency domain the quantity to be computed is the power spectrum  $|S_{out}(\nu)|^2$ :

$$\begin{aligned} I(\nu) &\propto S_{out}(\nu) \cdot S_{out}^*(\nu) = \\ &= \left( \sum_{n=N}^M a_n U_n S_e(\nu - n\Delta\nu) e^{-j2\pi\nu\Delta\tau_n/2} e^{j\phi_n} + \sum_{n=N}^M b_n U_n S_e(\nu - n\Delta\nu) e^{j2\pi\nu\Delta\tau_n/2} e^{j\phi_n} \right) \cdot (c.c.) \end{aligned} \quad (3)$$

relationship in which 'c.c' indicates the complex  
25 conjugated expression of the term in round parentheses.

According to the present invention, it is hereby demonstrated that the interference between different

spectral intervals  $S_e(\nu - n\Delta\nu)e^{j\phi_n}$  does not give rise to any significant contribution to the photo-current and therefore can be neglected.

For this purposes, the expression of the photo-current  
5 generated by the opto-electronic module (detector) 37 and by the amplifier 38 shall now be discussed in detail, with particular reference to the band limitation of the detector 37 and of the amplifier 38.

The module of the field incident on the opto-electronic  
10 module 37 has, as is well known, the following expression:

$$E_P(t, T) = \frac{1}{2} [E_{IN}(t) + E_{IN}(t + T)],$$

in which  $T = 2\frac{n}{c}(L_1 - L_2)$  is the delay introduced by the offset  
of the interferometer,  $E_P(t, T)$  is the electrical field  
incident on the opto-electronic module 37 and  $E_{IN}(t)$  is  
15 the electric field of the signal at the output of the fibre.

It should be noted that all signals depend on two  
variables: the variable  $t$  is the time variable whereon the  
signals are measured, with a domain coinciding with the  
20 time interval of the measurement (typically a few seconds).  
The variable  $T$  is, as stated, the delay introduced by the  
offsetting of the interferometer 25, with a domain that  
coincides with the DGD interval of interest, typically  
[0.1, 100] ps. The quadratic photo detection and electrical  
25 amplification process is characterised, neglecting the  
conversion constants of the physical magnitudes, by the  
following relationships between the signals:

$$I_R(t, T) = E_P^2(t, T) = \frac{1}{4} [E_{IN}(t) + E_{IN}(t + T)]^2 = \frac{1}{4} [E_{IN}^2(t) + E_{IN}^2(t + T) + 2E_{IN}(t)E_{IN}(t + T)]$$

$$I(t, T) = I_R(t, T) * h(t) = \frac{1}{4} [E_{IN}^2(t) + E_{IN}^2(t + T) + 2E_{IN}(t)E_{IN}(t + T)] * h(t)$$

in which  $I_R(t, T)$  is the current generated by the opto-electronic module 37 and sent to the amplifier 38,  $I(t, T)$  is the current at the output of the amplifier 38 and  $h(t)$  is the impulse response of the amplifier 38 with limited  
 5 band, which naturally depends only on the variable  $t$ .  
 Recalling that the signals  $E_{IN}(t)$  and  $E_{IN}(t+T)$  are at optical frequencies and that no electrical amplifier is capable of following their variations, one obtains:

$$I(t, T) = I_R * h(t) \propto \left\langle E_{IN}^2(t) \right\rangle_{1/B} + \left\langle E_{IN}^2(t+T) \right\rangle_{1/B} + 2E_{IN}(t)E_{IN}(t+T) * h(t)$$

10 in which the symbol  $\langle \rangle_{1/B}$  indicates the time average computed over an interval in the order of the reciprocal of the band of the amplifier 38.

Since the continuous component does not carry the information and is suppressed by the measuring instruments  
 15 of the PMD, it is best to consider only the alternate component of the previous signal:

$$I_{AC}(t, T) \propto E_{IN}(t)E_{IN}(t+T) * h'(t)$$

in which the spectrum of  $h'(t)$  coincides with that of  $h(t)$ ,  
 20 except in the origin where it is zeroed.

In the frequency domain, computing the Fourier transforms with respect to the variable  $t$ , one obtains:

$$\tilde{I}_{AC}(f, T) \propto [\tilde{E}_{IN}(f) * \tilde{E}_{IN}(f)e^{j2\pi fT}] \cdot \tilde{H}'(f) \quad (4)$$

It is readily apparent that the spectral components of the  
 25 convolution in parentheses that exceed the band of the amplifier 38, are cut by the amplifier 38 itself.

It is clear that, since the signal  $E_{IN}(f)$  has very broad band, typically some THz, to proceed with the analysis it is necessary to subdivide the spectrum into sectors:

30 
$$\tilde{E}_{IN}(f) = \sum_{n=-M}^M S_e(f - n\Delta f) e^{j\theta_n} .$$

Replacing this expression in (4), one obtains:

$$\tilde{I}_{AC}(f, T) \propto \left[ \sum_{n=-M}^M S_e(f - n\Delta f) e^{j\phi_n} * \sum_{n=-M}^M S_e(f - n\Delta f) e^{j\phi_n} e^{j2\pi n T} \right] \cdot \tilde{H}'(f) \quad (5)$$

According to the present invention, it is now possible to demonstrate that, under typical conditions of measurement and with commonly used amplifiers, thanks to the ratio between the band  $B$  of the amplifier and the extension  $\Delta f$  of the spectral sectors, the expression (5) can be reduced to the diagonal form. Considering, then, the convolution of two adjacent rectangular spectral sectors  $r_1(f)$  and  $r_2(f)$  of amplitude  $A$  and band  $\Delta f$ :

$$r_1(f) * r_2(f) = A^2 f, \quad 0 \leq f \leq \Delta f$$

Hereinafter the convolution of an elementary spectral sector with itself will also be considered:

$$r_1(f) * r_1(f) = -A^2 f + A^2 \Delta f, \quad 0 \leq f \leq \Delta f$$

To evaluate the influence of the convolution of adjacent sectors on the photo-current, one can compute the ratio between the energies of the two preceding convolutions in the band of the amplifier 38:

$$SNR = \frac{E_{11}}{E_{12}} = \frac{\int_0^B [r_1(f) * r_1(f)]^2 df}{\int_0^B [r_1(f) * r_2(f)]^2 df} = \frac{\int_0^B [-A^2 f + A^2 \Delta f]^2 df}{\int_0^B [A^2 f]^2 df} = \frac{\int_0^B [A^4 f^2 - 2A^4 f \Delta f + A^4 \Delta f^2] df}{\int_0^B [A^4 f^2] df},$$

20

$$SNR = \frac{E_{11}}{E_{12}} = \frac{\left[ \frac{A^4}{3} f^3 + A^4 f \Delta f^2 - A^4 f^2 \Delta f \right]_0^B}{\left[ \frac{A^4}{3} f^3 \right]_0^B} = \frac{\frac{A^4 B}{3} (B^2 + 3\Delta f^2 - 3\Delta f B)}{\frac{A^4 B^3}{3}} = \frac{(B^2 + 3\Delta f^2 - 3\Delta f B)}{B^2}.$$

Given that  $k = \Delta f/B$ , one easily computes:

$$SNR = 3k^2 - 3k + 1.$$

This value is further divided by two, taking into account that each sector has two adjacent sectors. The following

Table 1 shows the value of SNR/2 thus computed as a function of the  $\Delta f/B$  ratio.

$\Delta f/B$	SNR/2 (lin.)	SNR/2 (dB)
2	3.5	5.45
3	9.5	9.79
4	18.5	12.68
5	30.5	14.78
6	45.5	16.59
10	135.5	21.32

Tab. 1

It is readily apparent that for  $k=3$  the value of SNR/2 already approaches 10 dB and exceeds 22 dB for  $k=10$ .

One can therefore conclude that, having appropriately chosen the ratio  $k=\Delta f/B$ , the prevalent contribution to the convolution in (2) is given by the sum of the convolutions of the homologous terms, and hence the current photo-detected by the opto-electronic module 37 can be computed as:

$$\tilde{I}_{AC}(f, T) \propto \left[ \sum_{n=-M}^M S_e(f - n\Delta f) e^{j\phi_n} * S_e(f - n\Delta f) e^{j\phi_n} e^{j2\pi f T} \right] \cdot \tilde{H}^*(f) \quad (6)$$

Using the result just obtained, only the diagonal terms of the equation (3) survive and the photo-current  $I(\nu)$  takes on the following form:

$$I(\nu) \propto \sum_{n=N}^M (a_n^2 + b_n^2) U_n^2 |S_e(\nu - n\Delta \nu)|^2 + \sum_{n=N}^M (a_n b_n) U_n^2 |S_e(\nu - n\Delta \nu)|^2 \left( e^{-j2\pi n \Delta \tau_n} + e^{j2\pi n \Delta \tau_n} \right) \quad (7)$$

The equation (7) is, according to the present invention, the most general expression of the photo-current in the frequency domain that can be obtained without making hypotheses on the statistical nature of the PMD of the fibre being measured. Hereafter, the two cases of fibre

with deterministic PMD and with random PMD shall be examined separately.

An optical fibre with a deterministic birefringence (for example, a polarisation-maintaining fibre) is characterised by constant DGD and PSP as a function of frequency. Consequently:  $\Delta\tau_n = \Delta\tau$ ,  $a_n = a$ ,  $b_n = b$  are constant and the equation (7) is simplified in:

$$I(\nu) \propto (a^2 + b^2) \sum_{n=N}^M U_n^2 |S_c(\nu - n\Delta\nu)|^2 + ab(e^{-j2\pi\nu\Delta\tau} + e^{j2\pi\nu\Delta\tau}) \sum_{n=N}^M U_n^2 |S_c(\nu - n\Delta\nu)|^2,$$

i.e.,

$$10 \quad I(\nu) \propto (a^2 + b^2) |S_{in}(\nu)|^2 + ab(e^{-j2\pi\nu\Delta\tau} + e^{j2\pi\nu\Delta\tau}) |S_{in}(\nu)|^2.$$

A Fourier anti-transform directly yields the expression of the photo-current in the time domain:

$$I(T) \propto (a^2 + b^2) s_c(T) + ab[s_c(T - \Delta\tau) + s_c(T + \Delta\tau)] \quad (8)$$

in which  $s_c(T)$  is the source auto-correlation function, and corresponds to the Fourier anti-transform of  $|S_{in}(\nu)|^2$ .

The photo-current has three components: the source auto-correlation function and its replications translated about the two symmetric points  $\pm\Delta\tau$ . This well known result [1] is obtained with simple calculation within the proposed model.

20 Therefore, thanks to said characteristics the side lobes of the interferogram have the same shape as the central peak and are located in the two points  $\pm\Delta\tau$ , symmetrical with respect to the central peak.

The case of fibre with random birefringence is the more important one in practice and requires a more complicated mathematical treatment. The analysis is founded on the computation of the average value of the random process represented by the photo-current  $I(\nu)$ .

This computation has dual importance. First of all, it leads to a simple and elegant formal result represented by

equation (9). Secondly, from the point of view of application to PMD measurement, this mathematical operation corresponds to a computation of averages of different measured interferograms, as will be shown hereafter, allowing an experimental verification of the proposed model. From equation (7) one computes the statistical average  $\langle \cdot \rangle$  of the photo-current:

$$\langle I(\nu) \rangle = \left\langle \sum_{n=N}^M (a_n^2 + b_n^2) U_n^2 |S_e(\nu - n\Delta\nu)|^2 + \sum_{n=N}^M a_n b_n U_n^2 |S_e(\nu - n\Delta\nu)|^2 (e^{-j2\pi\nu\Delta r_n} + e^{j2\pi\nu\Delta r_n}) \right\rangle.$$

Taking into account the linearity of the statistical mean and the fact that the random variables  $\Delta r_n$  are independent from the random variables  $a_n b_n$  and  $(a_n^2 + b_n^2)$  (this is a direct consequence of the random nature of the birefringence of the fibre), one immediately obtains:

$$\langle I(\nu) \rangle = \sum_{n=N}^M \langle a_n^2 + b_n^2 \rangle U_n^2 |S_e(\nu - n\Delta\nu)|^2 + \sum_{n=N}^M \langle a_n b_n \rangle U_n^2 |S_e(\nu - n\Delta\nu)|^2 \langle e^{-j2\pi\nu\Delta r_n} + e^{j2\pi\nu\Delta r_n} \rangle.$$

Since the statistical average of the exponential of the random variables  $\Delta r_n$  is their characteristic function  $\Psi_{\Delta r_n}(\nu)$ , the previous equation can be rewritten in the form:

$$\langle I(\nu) \rangle = \sum_{n=N}^M \langle a_n^2 + b_n^2 \rangle U_n^2 |S_e(\nu - n\Delta\nu)|^2 + \sum_{n=N}^M \langle a_n b_n \rangle U_n^2 |S_e(\nu - n\Delta\nu)|^2 (\Psi_{\Delta r_n}(-\nu) + \Psi_{\Delta r_n}(\nu)).$$

Moreover, for a given fibre, the characteristic functions  $\Psi_{\Delta r_n}(\nu)$  and the statistical averages  $\langle a_n b_n \rangle$  and  $\langle a_n^2 + b_n^2 \rangle$  do not depend on frequency; i.e. they do not depend on the sum index  $n$ . Therefore, the previous equation is simplified as:

$$\langle I(\nu) \rangle = \langle a^2 + b^2 \rangle \sum_{n=N}^M U_n^2 |S_e(\nu - n\Delta\nu)|^2 + \langle ab \rangle (\Psi_{\Delta r}(-\nu) + \Psi_{\Delta r}(\nu)) \sum_{n=N}^M U_n^2 |S_e(\nu - n\Delta\nu)|^2.$$

A Fourier anti-transform provides the statistical average of photo-current in the time domain:

$$\langle I(T) \rangle = \langle a^2 + b^2 \rangle s_c(T) + \langle ab \rangle s_c(T) * [f_{\Delta r}(-T) + f_{\Delta r}(T)], \quad (9)$$

in which  $f_{\Delta r}(T)$  is the probability density of  $\Delta r$ , and the asterisk indicates the convolution.

In this case, too, the photo-current is given by three  
 5 contributions. The first term of equation (9) is linked to the properties of coherence of the optical source, and it is represented by a peak located in the origin of the times axis. The second and third term correspond to two symmetrical lateral lobes and contain all the information  
 10 required to measure the PMD. The expression of the average photo-current, in spite of the symmetry about a peak in  $T=0$ , is very different from a Gaussian, due to the presence of the side lobes constituted by the convolution of  $s_c(T)$  with the probability density of the differential  
 15 group delay  $f_{\Delta r}(T)$ . Since it is assumed that the coherence time of the source (i.e. the width of the central peak) is negligible relative to the average DGD of the fibre, the two side lobes represent approximate measurements of the probability density of the DGD of the fibre. The quality of  
 20 this approximation depends, as stated, on the coherence time of the source used, and can be improved by means of an appropriate de-convolution of the interferometric diagram measured with the auto-correlation function of the source itself  $s_c(T)$  (this function can be measured separately by  
 25 directly connecting the optical source to the interferometer). Lastly, it can be stated that equation (9) is a generalisation of equation (8) if one only considers that the probability density of the DGD of a fibre with systematic birefringence is a Dirac function  $\delta$ .  
 30 Therefore, thanks to this characteristic the measurement of PMD with interferometric technique is

conducted not with a Gaussian interpolation of the interferogram, but rather by analysing at least one of the side lobes of the interferogram, considered, according to the present invention, as an approximate measurement of the probability density of the DGD associated with the PMD of the optical fibre 11.

The propagation model according to the present invention was tested by means of simultaneous PMD measurements using both the interferometric method, described in the present embodiment, and the method, also known, of JME or Jones Matrix Eigenanalysis.

The tested fibre (50 km of coil wrapped single mode conventional fibre) was placed in a thermal chamber at temperatures varying from about 2°C to about 60°C at 5°C steps. After each variation, the fibre was allowed to stabilise before conducting the interferometric and polarimetric measurements. Thereby, over several days, 15 interferograms and 15 DGD measurements with JME method (each constituted by 91 points) were acquired. The data were then processed with the following procedure:

- the mean of the interferograms was computed after they were normalised;
- said mean was compared with two symmetrical replications of the DGD probability density computed from the JME data.

Note that the first processing operation is suggested directly by the interpretation of the interferograms as probability density and corresponds to the computation of the mean photo-current as shown in equation (9).

From Fig. 4, which shows the results of the measurements, the good agreement between the results is readily apparent.

In particular, from the results of the measurements, it is readily apparent that the central peak of the

interferogram must be neglected because it depends only on the characteristics of coherence of the source and not on the PMD of the fibre.

The result obtained, according to the present  
5 invention, attributes a new physical meaning to the interferometric curves, particularly useful for measurement activities.

Obvious modifications or variations are possible to the above description, in the dimensions, shapes, materials,  
10 components, circuit elements, connections and contacts, as in the details of the circuitry and of the illustrated construction and of the method to be implemented, without thereby departing from the spirit of the invention as specified by the claims that follow.